by a convoy. " The opinion which at the time prevailed at the Admiralty[5] says the Official History, " was that, if merchantmen were placed under convoy, then the escort would have to be twice as numerous as the ships escorted. The Admiralty's advisers did not share the view, which *was not then uncommon,* that a comparatively weak escort would suffice."* What an amazing miscalculation !

An amazing miscalculation

But of all their delusions the most astounding was that which concerned the number of British vessels sailing the high seas and needing escort. This was not some obscure and disputable issue that could be determined only by risky experiment. It was merely a matter of available statistics accurately added up. The blunder on which their policy was based was an arithemetical mix-up which would not have been perpetrated by an ordinary clerk in a shipping office. It nevertheless bewildered the Sea Lords and drove them out of their course for months. Common sense or reference to Lloyd's register and a sum in simple addition would have given them the facts. Up to the middle of 1917 there was no one on the Board of Admiralty who possessed this triple qualification.

Here is the fateful error in accountantship which nearly lost us the War, and might have done so had no one pointed it out in time to the Sea Lords.

For some time past the Admiralty had by order of

the Government been in the habit of publishing week by week the number of vessels lost by sub-

Deceived by their own figures

marine attacks. And in order to make this dismal news sound as hopeful as possible, they had issued with it a return supplied by the Customs Authorities of the number of vessels

* " Naval Operations," Vol. IV, p. 483